



NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 312.

Price, Five Cents.

NICK CARTER AMONG THE HOTEL THIEVES

OR
THE GREAT JEWEL ROBBERY



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF "NICK CARTER"

FRANKLIN PULLED A PISTOL FROM HIS POCKET, AND FIRED AT THE DETECTIVE'S HEAD, BUT NICK RAISED THE CASKET BEFORE HIS FACE, AND THE BULLET ENTERED THE SOFT WOOD.



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NEW YORK, December 20, 1902.

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Nick Carter Among the Hotel Thieves;

OR,

THE GREAT JEWEL ROBBERY.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

Ting-aring-aring-aring!

It was the call-bell from Room 123, and it continued to sound for several seconds after the boy went off to answer the summons.

"Madame Angot must be deucedly impatient," muttered the clerk to himself.

The clerk's name was Andrew Evans, and he was in charge of the desk of one of the finest hotels in New York City.

He was only twenty-three years old, but he was one of the smartest young men in the business.

He could read the average man or woman at a glance, and it was rarely that he failed to get onto any swindle that was attempted.

As Evans spoke he glanced at the clock.

The hands on the dial pointed to exactly seven minutes past one.

Less than five minutes before, Madame Angot and her husband had passed in at the ladies' entrance of the hotel, and taken the elevator to the third story, where the couple occupied an elegant suite of rooms.

Madame Angot was one of the leading contraltos at the Metropolitan Opera House, and had that night made one of the greatest hits of her life.

After being complimented by the manager and a number of others upon her success in the new rôle she had sung, she and her husband and five others had accepted the invitation of Mr. Lawrence Temple, the banker, and partaken of supper at Delmonico's.

The feast of good things and flow of champagne had lasted until twenty minutes to one.

Then the madam and her husband had entered their coach, and were driven directly to the hotel.

"It was, indeed, a success, Aida," remarked her husband, as they rolled along.

"Yes, yes, Pains, and I am so glad," was the reply. "But one regret remains."

"And that?"

"I did not wear all my diamonds. In my haste I left the best of them behind, as well as those bracelets the prince gave me, and the brooch the Count Mundt sent."

"Never mind, they will shine another time, Aida; your voice was the best of all jewels to-night."

A moment later the pair entered the elevator, left it at the third story, and entered one of their rooms.

The gas was turned low, and a bright fire burned in the open grate.

The husband drew up an easy-chair for his wife, but, before she sat down, she turned to one of her dressing-cases to bring forth the jewels she had left behind.

She usually kept them in a handsome sandalwood box, silver bound, and lined with satin and plush.

She unlocked the middle drawer of the dressing-case, and put down her hand to draw forth the casket.

Then she gave a suppressed scream.

Her husband, who was just taking off his gloves in front of the fire, started and turned.

"What is the matter?"

"The jewel casket—is——"

"What, Aida?"

"It is gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes, Pains. See, it is nowhere in the drawer. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Did you put it in any other place by mistake?"

"No, no! I have but the one spot. It has been stolen."

"But was not the drawer locked?"

"I think so—I put the key in it, but, whether I turned it or not, I cannot remember."

"Where is Annette?"

"In the next room, I suppose."

Her husband crossed the room, and knocked on a door.

"Annette, Annette!" he called.

In a moment a tidy-looking maid appeared.

"Annette, have you seen my jewel casket?" cried the madam, turning to her quickly.

"The casket! Oh, no, madam!"

"It is gone."

"Gone! Madam has it not?"

"No."

The girl gave a cry.

"And the jewels—the beautiful diamonds——" she gasped.

"All gone."

The maid sank back into a chair.

All the color seemed to leave her face, and she trembled from head to foot.

"You know nothing of the matter?" asked the husband, sharply.

"Oh, no, sir; I know nothing."

But as she spoke, the girl clasped her hands and averted her face.

"Was any one in the rooms while we were gone?"

"I saw no one, sir."

"Ring the bell, Pains," put in Madame Angot.

"Ring it quickly."

When the bellboy appeared he found the madam in a chair in a dead faint.

"Send Mr. Maillard, the proprietor, here at once," said the husband.

The bellboy disappeared, and the husband turned his attention to his wife, who was slowly recovering.

"A glass of water, Annette."

It was brought, and just as Madame Angot opened her eyes and sat up, Mr. Horace Maillard appeared.

"You wished to see me?" he asked.

"I did, sir," was the reply.

"My jewels, my precious jewels," cried the madam, starting. "Oh, Mr. Maillard, some one has stolen my jewel casket!"

"What!" ejaculated the hotel proprietor, in dismay.

"It is true, sir," put in her husband. "It was left in

that drawer when we went to the opera house, and now it is gone."

Mr. Maillard knitted his brows.

The crime was the first that had occurred at the house for a long while.

"What did the box contain?" he asked, quickly.

"All my jewels with the exception of these," replied Madame Angot, holding out those she had worn.

"And their value?"

"Priceless."

Such was the woman's answer.

"Not less than thirty thousand dollars," said her husband.

Mr. Maillard gave a low whistle.

Here was, indeed, a loss. What was to be done?

"Do you know anything of the matter?" he demanded, turning to the maid.

"Oh—I? I—I—know absolutely nothing," faltered the girl.

And she turned away her face.

"Was the door to the room locked when you came in?"

"It was," said the madam's husband.

"You are positive?"

"Yes. I had quite a time turning the key."

"As if the lock had been tampered with?"

"Possibly."

"I will make an investigation at once. Meanwhile, kindly keep the matter to yourselves."

And the hotel proprietor hurried out of the room.

Going below, he called Evans aside.

"Mrs. Angot's room has been robbed," he said. "Her jewel casket, containing thirty thousand dollars' worth of jewels, is gone."

"What!" Evans started back as if struck by a blow. "It can't be possible."

"Nevertheless, it is true. Telephone to Captain Titus at once."

The order was carried out on the spot.

"Who do you suppose took the casket?"

"Haven't any idea. Did any one go up to the room during the evening?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Did any stranger go to any of the rooms?"

"No."

"You knew every one who came in?"

"Yes, sir. There were Mayor Low, Gus Foley, Senator Ford, and a number of others, but I knew them all."

"Did any stranger come down?"

"I didn't see any, sir."

"Were you at the desk all the while?"

"Yes, sir."

The hotel proprietor mused for a moment.

"We will question the hallmen," he said.

This was done, but one and all declared that no suspicious person had been seen above the ground floor.

Then the bellboys were sent one by one to the private office, and made to tell all they knew.

Several of them thought they had seen a man on the second floor, but they were not sure.

In the midst of the examination one of Captain Titus' assistants arrived, and he, aided by the hotel people, made a search for the box in the servants' rooms and a number of other places.

All in vain.

The casket was not found.

"This won't do," exclaimed Mr. Maillard. "Thirty thousand dollars' worth of jewels is a great loss, not to say anything of the blow it will be to the hotel's reputation. While all the other houses in this city have suffered from thieves of one kind or another, we have heretofore protected every guest who stopped here. The reputation must be maintained."

"I'd give a hundred dollars of my salary to see the fellow caught," exclaimed Evans. "It makes me feel sick to have the record broken. We ought to have a first-class detective on the case at once."

"You are right. I will send to the captain at once for the best man he can get."

"Why not send for Nick Carter?"

"Can we get him? Mr. Carter is generally pretty busy."

"I would try."

A little while later a message was sent to the great detective.

Mr. Maillard also notified the captain of what he had done.

"Get Nick if you possibly can," came back the reply over the telephone. "He is the best man in New York for that or any other kind of work. He has gone to Newark to settle a case, but he will be back early in the morning."

Just as this message arrived there came another ring of the bell from Room 123.

In a moment Mr. Maillard presented himself at the door.

"I wish a first-class detective sent for at once," said Madame Angot.

"It has been done already, madam."

"Whom have you sent for?"

"The best in the United States, Nick Carter."

"I have heard of him. When will he be here?"

Before the hotel proprietor could reply, a bellboy handed him a message.

"Mr. Carter says he will be here at six o'clock this morning," he said, after reading the note.

"I am glad," said the madam's husband. "I will give a thousand dollars to have the jewels recovered."

"Let me settle with Mr. Carter," said the hotel proprietor. "For in working to regain your jewels, he will also work to regain the reputation of this house."

CHAPTER II.

POINTS ON THE CASE.

At exactly six o'clock in the morning, a well-dressed gentleman, wearing curly black hair, and carrying a portfolio of music under his arm, appeared at the hotel.

By an ordinary observer, he would have been mistaken for an operatic singer, probably some solo tenor or baritone.

Looking around the office of the hotel, he stepped up to the proprietor.

"Well, Mr. Maillard, I am here, ready to undertake that case," he said, in a low voice.

The hotel proprietor looked surprised for an instant, then his face lit up with a smile.

"Then this is Nick Carter, the great detective?" he said.

"I am Nick Carter."

"But you are disguised?"

"I never appear in public otherwise."

"You make a good operatic singer." Mr. Maillard gave a short laugh. "Well, suppose we come to business at once."

"Nothing will suit me better. As you may know, my time is valuable."

"I know it, Mr. Carter, but if you will restore what has been stolen I will give you five thousand dollars."

"It's a bargain."

"Madame Angot is now trying to get a nap, but I will send up your card."

"Tell me what you know of the case first."

Mr. Maillard did so.

Nick made a note of all that was said.

"You can trust Evans to tell the truth?" he asked.

"Yes. I know the young fellow is thoroughly honest."

"And he saw no suspicious character go up or come down?"

"So he says."

"Who is the hallman on the third floor?"

"Decker is one."

"How long has he worked for you?"

"Six years."

"Honest?"

"I think so. Never heard anything to the contrary."

"Was this Annette in the room all the evening?"

"In that room and the one adjoining."

"Was the door open between the two?"

"Part of the time."

"Are there any other rooms to the suite?"

"Two."

"Were they closed up?"

"Yes; closed and locked."

"You are sure the girl did not go out any time during the evening?"

"No one saw her."

"Is she still in the rooms?"

"I believe so."

Nick mused for a moment.

"I am ready to go up," he said, finally.

A little later Mr. Maillard introduced him to Madam Angot and her husband.

The story was gone over once more, and the great detective gained a few other points.

He learned that Annette was in the habit of getting madam ready for her carriage, and then taking a nap on the lounge in her room until her mistress came back, no matter how late the hour.

"When were you left alone last night?" he asked of the girl.

"About half-past seven, sir."

"Did you lock the door?"

"No, sir. Monsieur Angot he lock the door from the outside."

"Did you have a key?"

"No, sir. I have one key for the door of my own room only."

"Does it open upon the main hall?"

"No, sir; on one side hall."

"But the door between this room and the other was open?"

"Yes, sir."

"All the time?"

"No. I get cold, and I shut him."

"Where?"

The French girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Ten, eleven o'clock."

"And you allowed it to remain closed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear any noise in this room?"

"No. I was too sleepy and sleep good."

"Was the door of your room locked during that time?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you heard nothing unusual?"

"Not a sound."

"You are a heavy sleeper."

"Yes, very heavy, sir."

Nick looked at the girl closely.

Her eyes were red, and under them were heavy black

rings as if their owner was suffering greatly from the loss of sleep.

Without saying anything more, the detective inspected the suite of rooms in which the robbery had been committed.

The two main apartments faced the street. Behind the one to the left, which was on the main hall, was the madam's chamber, and next to this, on the side hall, was the girl's room. One of the elevators was situated at the point where the two halls joined.

The girl's room beside the madam's apartment was dark, but the room in front of it contained a window on the street, and another looking down on the top of a low three-story building, the roof of which was directly under the window sill.

"Do you usually keep this window locked up?" asked Nick.

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Angot. "I always make it a point to lock it before we go out."

The detective passed over to the window, and found it was tightly locked.

"Has it been this way all night?"

"Yes, no one has touched it."

He opened the window carefully and looked out.

As he did so the print of a muddy foot upon the outer edge of the sill caught his eye.

He bent down and examined the mark.

It was still fresh.

"Did any one go out of this window yesterday?" he asked.

"Not to my knowledge," replied Madam Angot.

And the French girl shook her head.

Nick hopped out of the window, and walked around the roof.

It was of plain tin, having a chimney in the center and another in the rear.

Near the center chimney was a scuttle leading to a stairs.

The scuttle was locked.

Walking around the edge of the roof, Nick soon came to the conclusion that no escape could be made in that way excepting by a rope.

He was about to re-enter the window, when he saw

a bit of white fluttering in the wind on the rough bricks of the chimney.

He secured the thing, and found it to be a bit of rare lace, about an inch wide and sixteen inches long.

He took it back with him to the room.

"Does this belong to you?" he asked of Madam Angot.

"Why, yes, it is one of my collars."

"When did you wear it last?"

Madam examined it.

"Yesterday afternoon," she cried. "Where did you find it?"

"On the roof!"

"And the window was locked, Annette."

The girl came forward.

"The gentleman tells me this was found on the roof outside. How did it get there?"

"On the roof?" The girl gave a cry, and turned white. "Perhaps it blew from the window," she faltered.

"But you say the window was closed and locked," put in Nick, dryly.

The girl clasped her hands, and sank down before her mistress.

"Oh, madam, I know nothing of it! I am not guilty. I know not where so much as a single diamond has gone."

"But the window——"

"I—I—dusted it after you were gone, and I opened him for one short five minutes."

"Dusted? The room was clean when I left." Madam Angot grasped the French girl by the shoulder. "I think you are guilty. Tell the truth or you shall go to the prison."

CHAPTER III.

CLOSE WORK.

When thus accused, the French girl gave a loud scream.

Nick looked at her closely.

He was a keen reader of human character, but for once something in the maid's manner bothered him.

Was it possible that she was guilty, and all this show of innocence was mere acting?

As Madam Angot turned to the girl, her husband turned to Nick.

"What do you think of this?" he whispered.

"I never think," was the quiet reply.

"I go to prison!" cried the maid. "Oh, no, no! Have mercy!"

"Yes, to the prison you shall go. Is she not guilty?" continued the great songstress, turning to the detective.

"Not proven," was the short reply. "You say you dusted in the evening directly after your mistress went away?" he asked of the girl.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you generally dust at that time?"

"Sometimes."

"But not often?"

"Sometimes, I say."

"And you closed and locked the window just as soon as you were through with the work?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Nick stalked over to the open window, and stood for a moment in silence.

Then he wheeled around suddenly.

"We will have the girl taken to the prison," he commanded. "Please ring the call-bell."

At these words the girl gave a terrible cry and burst into tears.

"The man to take you away will soon be here," went on Nick to her. "If you have anything to confess you had better do so now."

For an instant the girl sprang forward as if about to speak.

Then she closed her mouth tightly and turned away. This action was not lost upon the great detective.

"That girl knows something about this," he thought.

"Perhaps she is the accomplice of some skillful thief."

In a moment the bellboy appeared.

"Tell Mr. Maillard to send for an officer."

This was done, and soon a policeman came.

"Now, have you anything to say?" asked Nick of the maid.

"No."

Such was the short reply.

"Annette, tell the truth," cried Madam Angot.

"I say nothing more."

A little later the girl was taken away.

"She is guilty, but that does not bring back the diamonds," sighed the madam.

"She is not guilty," replied Nick. "But she knows something she does not care to tell. Perhaps the captain can get her to confess."

Madam Angot shook her head.

She was sure she was right.

Nick continued to inspect the rooms, and at length turned his attention to the drawer from which the casket had been taken.

The lock was a plain one, and Nick saw that it could be picked with ease.

But this had not been done.

Clinging to the edges of the keyhole were minute particles of wax, and some of the wax was to be found on the carpet.

"A positive clew," muttered the detective to himself.

Taking some wax from his own pocket, he took an impression of the lock, and stowed it away for future use.

He was about to give up when something prompted him to look under the set of drawers.

He did so, and brought forth a shoe button, not the common kind, but such as are fastened with a patent catch.

"From any of your shoes?" he asked of the madam and her husband.

"No."

"Did the girl use such a button?"

Her shoes were at once brought forth and examined.

All were furnished with the common buttons.

"Another positive clew," thought Nick.

"Well, what do you think now?" asked Mr. Angot.

"I will tell you later," Nick replied, with a laugh.

After another brief look around, Nick went downstairs and had a further interview with the proprietor.

"Do you think you will win?" asked Mr. Maillard, anxiously.

"If I don't it will be the first failure I have ever made."

"I am glad to hear it. For my sake as well as your own don't break your record."

"I won't. Now I want to interview your hallmen and the bellboys."

"All right. Here, you can have my private office and examine them at your leisure."

Nick entered the office, and the first man brought to him was the hallman named Decker.

"You were on duty in the hallway of the third floor from what time?"

"From noon to midnight, sir."

"Who relieved you?"

"Danny Gould, sir."

"Was he on hand when you went away?"

"He came up in the elevator when I went down, sir."

"Where did you pass him?"

"I didn't pass him, sir. I met him on the ground floor."

"And you saw him get into the elevator?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice any suspicious characters in the halls while you were on duty?"

"No, sir."

"No one at all?"

"Not a soul. There was only ten or twelve people up there all the evening, and I knew every one of them."

"Did you pass Madam Angot's rooms?"

"Several times."

"Did you hear any noise in them?"

"I thought I heard some one talking and laughing."

"Who was it?"

"I heard that French girl laugh."

"Who was she talking to?"

"I ain't sure that she was talking to anybody. I kinder thought I heard another voice, but I wasn't sure."

"In what room?"

"In the far corner room."

"What time was this?"

"Between eight and nine o'clock."

"When did the sounds stop?"

"Some time after ten."

"And they were not renewed?"

"I didn't hear anything more."

Nick dismissed the man, and called for Danny Gould.

Gould was a broad-faced, humorous Irishman.

"You took Decker's place at midnight."

"Oi did that, sur."

"Where did you meet Decker?"

"On the ground flure."

"Did you go right up to the third floor?"

"Oi did afther a bit, sur."

"After a bit? What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, sur, Oi'm a bit swate on Maggie Rooney, as is on the second flure, an' Oi shtopped off fer a second to—to——"

"I see. How long did you stay with Maggie?"

"About tin minutes, sur."

"Not more than ten?"

"Well, mayhaps fifteen, sur."

"Sure it wasn't half an hour?"

"It wasn't more than that, sur. You see, Maggie an' me, sur——"

"Never mind about that. Then you went up at the end of the half-hour?"

"Yis, sur."

"Did you notice anything suspicious?"

"Divil a bit, sur. Not a soul was about till the madam an' her man kim in."

"Did you hear any sounds in her rooms?"

"Not a wan, sur."

"All right. You can go."

After Gould had departed, the bellboys were called in one after another.

The first five had no testimony to give.

The sixth was a boy named Poole.

"Did you go up to the third floor during the evening?"

"Yes, sir; up to Room 126."

"What for?"

"The gentleman wanted the morning paper up."

"Was it taken up?"

"Yes, sir. Johnson took it."

"Who was the paper for?"

"The gentleman in the room, Mr. Dilks."

"Did you go near Madam Angot's rooms?"

"No, sir."

"See anything suspicious?"

"No, sir. But——"

"What?"

"I suppose it ain't got nothing to do with it, but Mr. Dilks was cleaning a pistol, when he told me to send up the paper."

CHAPTER IV.

A VERY STRANGE DISCOVERY.

"Mr. Dilks was cleaning a pistol?"

"Yes, sir."

"What kind of a pistol?"

"A nickel-plated one, sir. I didn't get a very good look at it, for when I came in he hid it behind a center-table."

"Is Mr. Dilks an old guest?"

"No, sir, he came about a week ago."

"Do you know if he is in his room now?"

"I don't, sir."

"What kind of a looking man is he?"

"Tall, with a black beard."

Nick mused for a moment.

"You can go, Poole."

After Poole was gone there came a sharp tap on the door, and the next bellboy entered.

He was very slender, with blue eyes and light curly hair.

"Mr. Maillard said you wished to see the different bellboys, sir."

"I do. What is your name?"

"Georgie Franklin, sir."

The voice came thin and clear, and Nick looked at the speaker closely.

"Were you up to the third floor last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do?"

"I answered a call from Room 135."

"What was it?"

"Mrs. Van Gilder wanted the fire attended to."

"Any other call?"

"Yes, sir. No. 142 wanted a bottle of extra dry."

"Who was it?"

"Senator Parsons."

"I see. Any other call?"

"No, sir."

While asking questions Nick had examined the bellboy closely.

There was something about Franklin's make-up that puzzled him.

Suddenly an idea flashed through his mind.

"If there was only some way to prove it," he thought to himself.

He looked out of the window, which opened upon a small side courtyard of the hotel.

On a high fence opposite a cat was sitting.

"Confound that cat! it makes me nervous!" he cried, jumping up. "Here, Franklin, take that paper weight, and when I open the window let the beast have it in the neck."

And he threw open the window.

The bellboy took up the paper weight rather gingerly, swung his arm around over his shoulder, and let fly the object, which struck the fence about three feet below the cat.

"Not much of a shot," observed Nick, as he let down the window. "Any woman could throw as well as that."

The bellboy's face grew red as fire, and then white.

"I haven't had a chance to throw a ball in a year," he explained.

"Well, never mind, the cat is gone, and that's the main thing. Now, tell me, did you see any suspicious character on the third floor while you were up there?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, you can go."

After Franklin had departed the remainder of the bellboys were called in, but nothing of importance was learned. Then Nick called Mr. Maillard.

"I have made one important discovery," said the detective. "Whether or not it affects this case I can't say, but it is something that you ought to know."

"What is it, Mr. Carter?"

"It concerns Georgie Franklin. How long have you had that bellboy in your service?"

"Not very long, in fact, but two or three weeks."

"How did you come to engage the person?"

"He looked neat and willing, and I needed extra hands."

"Did you know Georgie Franklin was a girl, or rather, a young woman?"

"A girl!"

"Exactly."

"Mr. Carter, it cannot be possible."

"It is true."

"How did you discover this fact? She looks like a boy."

"Not if you look at her sharply. I had my suspicions aroused as soon as I heard her voice, and I made up my mind to test her. I got her to throw one of your paper weights out of the window at a cat, and she threw it just as a woman throws and not a man."

Mr. Maillard mused for a moment.

"I believe you are right. I'll have her locked up at once."

"Do nothing of the kind. Don't even let her think you suspect her."

"But——"

"She may know something of this mysterious robbery. Mind, I don't say she does, but it is best to wait and see. You can have her arrested later on."

"It shall be as you say."

"Now, I want to know about Mr. Dilks, who occupies Room 126."

"What of him?"

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. Shall I ask Evans?"

"Yes."

The hotel proprietor left the office and came back in five minutes.

"Mr. Dilks engaged the room last Monday, and left last night," he said. "Evans don't know him. He says the man talked iron, and he took the fellow to be some construction company's agent."

"Left last night? Where did he go to?"

"Evans didn't know."

"Then that's all. Now, I'm ready to go to work."

"I think you have done a little work already."

Nick smiled, but made no answer.

A little later he left the hotel. His disguise was completely changed, and now, instead of looking like a singer, he would have passed anywhere for a carpenter or cabinet-maker. He wore a soft hat, several thick pencils were sticking from his vest pocket, and his clothing was covered with fine sawdust.

From the hotel he struck out directly for the East Side. It was not long before he came to a locksmith's establishment, and this he entered.

Mr. Fodenshine, the proprietor, was waiting on a customer, but he was soon at liberty.

"Vot can I do for you, sir?" he asked, brusquely.

"Can you make a key for me from a wax impression?"

"We can, if the impression is a clear one."

"My partner had one impression taken and a key

made, but we have got to have another key. Here is the impression."

And Nick brought it forth.

Mr. Fodenshine's eye lighted up when he saw it.

"I made dot key for dot bardner of yours," he said.

"You are sure? I want a key just like the other one."

"I vos bositive, sir. It vas von funny little key."

"Do you remember what kind of a looking man my partner was?"

"A tall man mit red viskers."

"That's him. When will you have the key for me?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

"All right."

Nick left the shop at once.

"So the man who had that key made was a tall fellow, who wore red whiskers. That is one point gained.

"Who can it be? This Dilks was supposed to have a black beard, but among professional crooks such a trifle is easily adjusted.

"I wonder if it would pay me to shadow that girl? If I don't strike a running clew by evening I'll see what can be done in that direction."

Thus musing, Nick wandered down the street.

So deep was he in thought that he did not think where he was going, and unconsciously he turned into a side street that for bad reputation holds its own with any in the metropolis.

Suddenly he felt a terrible blow on the head.

A strange light danced in front of his eyes, and he staggered up against a building, and then slid to the pavement.

CHAPTER V.

ROUGH TREATMENT.

"Guess he's done for. If he is, I had better skip. Dat brick on the head did the business."

In a far-away, dazed fashion Nick heard the words.

Then his brain whirled round and round, and it was several minutes before he could open his eyes.

At length, however, he did so, and sat up.

There was a big swelling on his head, and a severe wound beside the left ear.

Close at hand lay a full-sized brick.

It did not take the great detective long to realize what had happened.

The brick had been dropped on him from above.

He remembered the words he had heard, and looked up and down the street.

No one but a number of ragged and dirty children were to be seen.

Slipping into a nearby alley, he dressed his wound and changed his disguise.

As he did so, he was busy thinking over what had happened.

Who had attacked him? Was it some old offender, or was it some one connected with the hotel mystery?

When he emerged from the alley he was transformed into a ragged and half-drunken Dutchman.

"Say, you childs," he hiccoughed. "Did you see von mans go by der street down chust now?"

"I did, Dutchy."

"Who vos it?"

"Do yer wanter know, pop?" put in a little girl.

"Yah."

"Then find out."

And the little girl made off, laughing shrilly.

But in just two seconds Nick had her by the collar.

"Make fun of me, vill you?" he snarled.

"Lemme go."

The girl was frightened half to death.

"I let you go ven you tole me who dot man vos."

"Will yer?"

"Yah; but you must tole me der truth, or I vos lick you halluf ter death."

"It was Blinky Nolan."

Nick thought for a moment.

Blinky Nolan was one of the toughs of the district.

"Did he run?"

"Kinder walked fast. Lemme go now?"

"Vere did he go?"

"Around dat corner. You said you'd lemme go, if I tol' yer."

"Yah, and I vos keeps mine word. Here vos a penny for you."

And, handing over the coin, Nick shuffled along and around the corner.

Once out of sight, he straightened up and brushed some of the dirt from his clothing.

Then he pulled his hat over his eyes and adjusted a heavy red beard.

"Now, why did Blinky Nolan treat me in this manner?" he thought. "It isn't possible that he is connected with the hotel mystery—that isn't in his line. Can it be possible that he has been hired by somebody to do me up?"

He had hardly finished the thought before he caught sight of Nolan coming out of a saloon.

The tough had been having a bracer after what he thought had been his deadly work.

No sooner had he appeared than Nick walked up to him.

"Say, mine friend," he began.

"Say it yerself," growled Nolan. "What does yer want, cully?"

"Vot ist der best vay ter git by dot Bowery, ain't it?"

"Der Bowery, hey? Vot yer want in de Bowery?"

"I vos lookin' by a feller vot schwindled me mine money avay alreatty."

"Did he lift yer?"

"Vot?"

"Swipe yer leather?"

"He took me mine pocketbook off."

"Dat's wot I mean. Yer might as well leave it go."

"Yah? Dis vos von awful town. By der next block I see me von dead mans on des sidevalk."

The tough shuddered and turned slightly pale.

"Did, hey?"

"Yah. Vill you go mit me and see him."

"Not much; I don't take to stiffs nohow. Let his friends come and help him."

And before Nick had a chance to say more, Nolan hurried away and down the street.

"That settles it; he is the man," thought Nick. "I will follow him up for a bit and see where he goes."

Stepping into a nearby coal yard, Nick took off his beard, turned his coat inside out, and otherwise altered his appearance.

When he came out the tough was fully a block ahead.

Nick kept him within easy sight. Nolan turned down a side alley, and, taking up his station on the opposite side of the street behind a billboard, the detective watched his every movement.

He saw Nolan approach a dingy house that stood at the end of the opening, and, mounting the steps, knock upon the door five separate times, and then kick his foot upon the stoop.

A second later the door was opened, and the tough entered.

"Mammy Tooter's ranch," said Nick to himself. "What can Nolan be doing there?"

For a moment he thought to gain an entrance into the building, but then he concluded that it would take

too much time—time that might be spent more profitably elsewhere.

"I can put Chick onto the thing. He can do such work just as well as any one."

It was close on to supper-time, when Nick presented himself at the hotel again.

"Ah, Mr. Carter, I have just received a letter in reference to the case," said Mr. Maillard.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Here it is, you can read it for yourself."

Nick took the letter which had been sealed but not posted, and read the following:

"MR. MAILLARD, DEAR SIR:—You made a great mistake when you had Miss Annette Garnet arrested for that stolen jewellery case. She had nothing to do therewith and You had better Let her go fre,

"yours truly,

"ONE WHO KNOWS THE TRUATH."

"What do you think of it?"

"I think it tells the truth."

"You think the girl is innocent?"

"Of the robbery, yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I think she knows of something in connection with the case that she does not care to tell."

"Ah, I see!"

"Who brought this letter?"

"I don't know. It was left on the desk during a rush, and Evans did not pick it up for five or ten minutes after," said Mr. Maillard. "Evidently the writer was not an educated man."

"The misspelling may be only a blind. One thing is certain, the party who wrote it was a foreigner, possibly a German or a Frenchman."

"How do you know that?"

"Do you notice how the letters slope? That is a foreign hand. No Americans write in that fashion."

"That's so! You detectives think of everything."

"That is our business. So there is no means of finding out who left it on the desk?"

"Evans thought it might have been a tall man, who was looking at the directory."

Nick took the sheet of paper, and examined it closely.

"Foreign paper, too," he went on. "Let us see if we can determine the brand."

"What good will that do?"

"We may be able to find out where it came from." Nick peered at the paper closely. "Ah, what is this!"

In turning the sheet over his eye had rested upon a line of writing that had been almost totally erased.

He walked over to a window, and got out his microscope.

"What do you see?" asked Mr. Maillard, eagerly.

"It is very faint."

At length Nick began to put down letters.

"—n—tt— a—rn—"

He looked at them for a moment.

"What are the words, Mr. Carter?"

"Annette Garnet."

"Indeed! Can you make out the rest?"

"Not at present. But, perhaps, I can after I prepare the paper. By the way, I wish to go up to Madam Angot's apartments and examine that girl's trunk."

"All right. The madam and her husband are out. Wish to go up alone?"

"Yes."

"Then here is the key to 123."

A moment more Nick was in the elevator.

He was the only passenger, and the man in charge was so sleepy that he paid but scant attention to what was going on.

"Third," said Nick.

They began to rise slowly.

As they passed the second floor Nick peered through the door, and saw a sight that thrilled him to the heart.

In the corridor, but a few feet away, a tall man and a bellboy were quarreling.

The bellboy held a small square bundle in his hand, and the man was trying to get it away.

In his right hand the man had a short dagger, and Nick saw that he was about to make an attempt upon the bellboy's life.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ELEVATOR SYSTEM.

What did it mean?

For the instant Nick was so surprised that he could not determine what to do.

Then he turned and stopped the elevator.

"What did you do that for?" cried the man in charge.

"Let me out at the second floor."

"The second? But I thought you wanted the third."

"I've changed my mind."

"Guests ain't allowed to touch the pull."

"I'm in a hurry."

The man allowed the elevator to descend.

For about five seconds it had gone up out of sight.

As it did so, Nick fancied that he heard an angry and surprised exclamation.

Had he been seen?

They stopped at the second floor, and Nick passed out into the hall.

The man and the bellboy had disappeared.

In vain Nick looked up and down and into the side halls.

Not a trace of either could be seen. It was as if the very floor had opened and swallowed them up. For once the great detective was surprised.

Never before had he witnessed such a rapidity of movement.

His passing must have been noticed, and both bellboy and man must have run for it immediately.

Nick could not help but wonder who the two were, and what the square package had contained.

The faces of both had been turned away from him, and, in the dim light, Nick had noted nothing by which either of them could be identified.

As he passed over the spot the detective's boot pressed down upon some hard, round substance that lay imbedded in the soft carpet.

He stooped and picked the object up.

It was a shoe button, similar to the one found in the madam's room.

Here was a clew.

Beyond a doubt, the man who had stolen the jewels and the fellow who had attacked the bellboy were one and the same.

But who was the fellow?

Was it Mr. Dilks, formerly of Room 126?

Not improbable.

Seeing that nothing was to be gained by lingering in the hall, Nick mounted the stairs to the third floor, and passed into Madam Angot's apartments.

In the girl's room he found a neat leather trunk.

It took but a second to pick the lock, and he threw open the lid.

The trunk was filled with clothing, and various other articles of a woman's toilet.

There was also a box containing a pocketbook, with forty two dollars in it, a jewel case with a few cheap ornaments, and a bundle of letters.

Nick glanced at the letters.

They were all in French, but the detective was a first-class scholar and had no difficulty in reading them.

A number of them were from parents and friends in Paris and Lyons.

Then came half a dozen written in New York.

These had been sealed, but not posted, and a glance convinced the detective that they had been written by the same party who had sent the recent communication to Mr. Maillard.

They were love letters, signed "Jean."

One in particular attracted Nick's attention.

Translated, it ran as follows:

"BELOVED ANNETTE:—Three long days have passed and I have not seen you. It is an eternity and I can wait no longer. I know you are busy and cannot leave your work, but to-night I shall come to you. Oh, if we were but rich how quickly I would make you mine! If I but possessed half the value of the madam's jewels I would never ask for more. Is it not hard to think that while she and her husband are so rich we are so poor? Why does she not grow generous and open her heart to you? Day never mind. Some day there will be a change, and we will be as rich and happy as any one. Remember I shall come to-night in the old way. Ever your own. JEAN."

Nick mused for several moments after perusing the epistle.

Who was the man who was in love with Annette Garnet?

Was it Mr. Dilks?

Was it the man seen in the corridor?

"Find him and I may find the man who stole the jewel casket.

"There is no doubt in my mind but what he called on the girl last night.

"When he called did he take the jewel casket without telling her?

"Most likely, for if ever there was an innocent maid she is one.

"Perhaps I had better call on her and have an interview."

This was Nick's decision, but it did not altogether satisfy him.

However, it was the best that could be reached for the present, and he had to be content.

He returned the letters to the trunk, and, after locking everything up again, passed from the apartments.

As he did so, he heard loud talking in the hall.

"At Mammy Tooter's?"

"Yes, to-night."

He moved in the direction of the voices, but when he reached the spot no one was to be seen.

"Another failure," he muttered to himself. "I must be getting slow."

Nick was terribly put out because he had not caught the two speakers.

But he felt certain of one thing. That was that one of them had been a man and the other a woman.

"Mammy Tooter's, eh?" he said to himself. "Then Blinky Nolan is in the game, after all."

The threads of the mystery were still widely separated, but Nick was sure that sooner or later they would come to a common center.

The few words he had heard made him change his course of action.

There was to be a meeting of some kind at Mammy Tooter's that night, and he must be on hand to witness what took place.

Mammy Tooter was a notorious fence, who, more than once, had been up before the courts for receiving stolen goods and sheltering criminals from the iron hand of the law.

But for some reason or influence she had got off scot free, and her ranch was still in a flourishing condition.

Nick knew that to enter the place he must stand a rigid examination.

Mammy Tooter and her son Jake were not to be taken in easily, and, if discovered, Nick knew that his life would be worth nothing more than the insurance upon it.

In thinking the matter over Nick came to the conclusion that the man he heard speak in the hall was going to the old fence's place to see Nolan.

Why, he could not determine, excepting it might be to concoct some new villainy or settle up for what had been done.

Jumping into a cab, the detective was driven home with all possible speed.

Here he found Chick in deep conversation with Patsy.

"Well, boys, anything new?" asked Nick.

"If you don't mind we intend to take up that five-hundred-dollar check mystery, in Thirty-eighth street," said Chick. "I have an idea I can get the fellow who passed that check."

"And I have an idea that I can get the party who got the bogus check signed," put in Patsy.

"You mean it wasn't a forgery?" asked Nick.

"I do," said Patsy. "The signature is genuine. Mr. Parlett admits as much, but he says he can't remember signing such a check."

"Have you anything to work on?"

"I have a description of the man who drew the money. He impersonated Frank Harrison, you know," replied Chick.

"I have a theory, based on a telegram that Mr. Parlett received, and which he says was not necessary," added Patsy.

"What is it?"

"Simply this: That telegram was sent by the man who drew the money. It was delivered by his partner, who approached Mr. Parlett when he was in a great hurry, and got the gentleman to put his name down in the book without noticing upon what he was writing."

"You mean that he signed on the bottom of a blank check instead of on the page of a book?"

"Yes."

"Rather far-fetched, but good enough to begin on," replied Nick.

"And we can go ahead?" asked Chick.

"Certainly. I believe I can work this hotel robbery alone, although it is a deep game."

"I am willing to help on that, if you say the word," put in Patsy, eagerly.

"No, go ahead on your own hook."

"All right."

"By the way, what kind of a looking boy was it delivered the telegram?"

"My theory is that it wasn't a boy at all," said Patsy.

"Yes?"

"I think it was a girl. I asked Mr. Parlett about it, and he half agrees with me. That is another reason why I want to take up the case."

"How did he or she look?"

"He was tall and thin."

"Have light blue eyes?"

"Yes. How did——"

"And light curly hair?"

"That's the description. How in the world did you know. Have you been working on the case?"

"No; but I think I can tell you where that boy-girl is to be found."

"Where?"

"Down at the hotel I just came from. She is act-

ing as a bellboy under the name of George Franklin——"

"That's the name of the messenger," cried Patsy.

"Is he still working for the telegraph company?"

"No, he left about three weeks ago."

"Just the time that Franklin went to work at the hotel. I think you have struck a clew, Patsy."

"Thank you, sir, you are the one that pointed it out. Can I work on it?"

Nick mused for a moment.

"I may want to use the girl," he said. "Do what you please in secret, but, before you allow the girl to know a word of what you are up to report to me."

"I will, sir."

"If you don't, it may spoil my case."

"I'll be careful, sir."

And Chick promised the same thing.

CHAPTER VII.

MAMMY TOOTER'S RANCH.

Nick did not tell his two assistants all he knew.

He preferred that they should work out their own case.

If the girl, Georgie Franklin, was a bad one, it was not improbable that she was connected in some way with the disappearance of Madam Angot's jewels.

The detective knew well that a sneak thief could have secured valuable assistance from a bellboy, who could tell him all about the location of the guests' rooms, and when people were in the habit of leaving their apartments and coming back.

There were many deductions to follow this thought, the principal one of which was that Georgie Franklin might have been the bellboy who had been attacked in the hallway.

If so, who was the man who had attacked her?

Was it the Frenchman called Jean? and was he the same man who had presented that five-hundred-dollar check for payment?

Nick dismissed the latter thought at once. Up to a few days before Jean had written that he was poor. If he had gotten the money on the check this would not have been true.

"There is another man in the case, possibly that Mr. Dilks," muttered the great detective to himself. "And the robbery lays between the French lover and the unknown, with the evidence pointing strongly to the former."

A little later Nick emerged from the house by the back way.

He was completely disguised, not only his outward appearance being changed, but even his underclothing and the things he carried in his pocket.

Any keen-eyed New Yorker would have taken him for a bunco steerer or a pickpocket.

As he passed down the street he met two men in disguise whom he knew were Chick and Patsy.

He rushed up, and took Chick's hand.

"Why, how d'ye do, old boy," he exclaimed.

"Come off, you're on the wrong lay, old man," was the quick reply.

"Oh, no, I'm not."

"Bet you a dollar you are," put in Patsy.

"Take you up," returned the great detective. "Or make it two, and I'll name you both."

"Done!" and Patsy drew out the money.

The great detective covered it.

"Your friend is Chickering Carter——"

"How in the world——"

"And you are Patsy Murphy?"

"And who in the devil are you?" burst out Chick.

"And I am Nicholas Carter."

"Nick."

"Exactly. Does the make-up go?"

"It is perfect," cried Patsy, and Chick agreed with him.

"I want to tell you two that I am off for Mammy Tooter's ranch," went on the great detective. "If I don't turn up by tomorrow noon make up your mind that something has happened, and that I need assistance."

"All right," said Chick.

"We'll be on the watch," added Patsy.

Nick hurried along, and about nine o'clock entered the street upon which Mammy Tooter's ranch was situated.

In a moment he stood before the alley, and here he paused.

To enter that den of vice was very much like putting one's head in a lion's mouth.

Should his identity be discovered, every one in the place would stand ready to take his life.

"Well, I have gone thus far, and I won't turn back," he said to himself, and he mounted the steps to the door.

He gave the same signal that Nolan had given, and, presently, a little slat beside the door was opened.

"Who's there?" asked a voice from out the darkness of the hallway.

"Easy there," whispered Nick.

"Say it ag'in, I didn't hear yer," growled the voice.

"That ain't it," whispered Nick. "I said be easy."

"Raise yer voice, yer darn galoot, I can't hear a word."

"Anybody like you makes me tired," howled Nick, in a slightly louder tone. "I tole yer ter pipe a bit lower."

"That's different." The speaker lowered his voice, and came closer to the opening. "Wot yer want? I don't know yer."

"Easy there, I knows you, Jake Tooter. Is Blinky Nolan here?"

"Maybe he is. Wot yer want ter know for?"

"Expect yer wants ter know all my business, don't yer?" replied Nick, sarcastically. "If yer do, let me cut yer short by tellin' yer it's no go. See?"

"Yer mighty fly, ain't yer?" howled Jake Tooter. "Tell me yer name, or I'll shut de peeper up."

"Eastern Frank. Does yer recognize it?"

"Rather guess I do, sonny. Yer wanted in New Bedford, ain't yer?"

"Well, der perlice wouldn't git outer der way, if da seed me comin'."

"Where you been keepin' yerself for der las' two years?"

"All around. Been down ter Elizabethport de las' tree weeks."

"An' yer wants ter see Blinky?"

"Yes. But don't let it out so loud. Dere's a fly cop comin' trough de street."

There was a second of silence. Then the "peeper" was closed, and the door was opened.

"Cum in wid yer," said Jake Tooter.

Nick entered, and the door was closed and bolted after him.

"Who give yer de signal?" asked Tooter, as they stood in the dark hallway.

"A feller wot sent me here ter see Blinky."

"Wot's his name?"

"Jean."

"Jean?"

"Yes."

"Wot's his other handle?"

"I don't know. He's a Frenchman."

"Humph! must be Jean Glorieaux," muttered Tooter to himself.

"Wot's his last name?"

"Glorieux. Tall, slim feller?"

"Dat's him."

"He's comin' here ter-night, ain't he?"

"He said he might, but I was to see Blinky an' make sure."

"Business on hand?"

"Bet yer sweet life."

"Better hurry up, then. Blinky is getting full fast."

Jake Tooter led the way to the end of the hallway and up a flight of narrow steps.

At the top he threw open a door, and ushered Nick into a large room, the windows of which were boarded over.

The place was dimly lighted by several kerosene lamps that gave forth a vile odor, which was mixed with the smell of strong liquor.

There were a number of small tables in the room along with a couple of dozen chairs.

Around the tables were seated just sixteen of the worst looking cutthroats in New York City.

Most of them were drinking and playing cards, while a few were plotting over more wrong-doings.

To one side, near a kind of a bar, sat Mammy Tooter, deep in conversation with the most brutal-looking individual in the place.

She looked up sharply as Nick entered, and cast inquiring glances at her son.

"There is Blinky in de corner," said Jake. And then he left the detective and hurried over to his mother.

Nick approached the tough, who had been drinking heavily, and held out his hand.

"Hullo, Blinky, old boy!" he exclaimed.

Nolan looked up sleepily, and leered at him.

"Hullo, yerself!" he hiccoughed. "Wot yer want?"

"I cum in ter see yer on business," went on Nick, in a loud voice, that Mammy Tooter, who was listening intently, might hear.

"On business?"

"That's it. De boss sent me."

"He did?" Nolan straightened up. "I thought he was comin' himself. He said he would be here about twelve o'clock."

"He will, if he can," Nick dropped his voice. "Say, Blinky, I wants ter talk ter you en de quiet."

"Wot yer want?" asked the tough, in a more subdued tone.

"Ter boss sent me here ter warn yer."

"Who are you?"

"Eastern Frank."

"I don't know him."

"Well, it don't matter. I knows de boss, an' dat's enough."

"Wot yer goin' ter warn me about?"

"De fly cops is onter yer."

"Wot fer?"

"Fer downin' Nick Carter."

Blinky Nolan turned pale.

"Who says I downed him?"

"He says so himself, leastwise he did, afore he died."

"It ain't so."

"He said so, an' it goes. He says you struck him wid a brick, and smashed his skull. He crawled away, and got took to de hospital, but de doctors couldn't do nuthin' fer him, and he's a goner."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

So skillfully did the great detective tell his story that Blinky Nolan believed every word of it.

The tough was greatly disturbed, for he well knew that in killing the greatest detective in New York, as he supposed he had done, he had brought down upon himself all the wrath of Captain Titus.

He knew the detective and the captain had been warm friends, and that the latter would leave no stone unturned to bring whoever was guilty to justice.

"It's a lie, I didn't do it!" he burst out.

"Nick Carter said you did, an' his word goes every time," replied the detective. "De boss told me ter tell yer to keep shady fer a long time ter come."

"I intended ter do that, anyhow," replied Blinky. "I'm only waitin' fer him ter pony up, an' then I'll slide out fer Ruggle's place in Philly."

"Wot's de boss goin' ter give yer fer dis job?"

"Wot bus'ness is dat of yourn?"

"Nuthin, only I wouldn't be bought off too cheap, dat's all. I'm goin' ter strike him fer more dan he promised."

"Wot did you do fer him?"

"Oh, I was upstairs in de hotel."

"I'm goin' ter strike him fer two thousand plump," replied Blinky. "Say, have a glass?"

"Don't mind ef I do. Wot yer takin'?"

"Rye."

"Dat's me. Jake, give us annudder bot of rye, will yer?" called out Nick.

Jake Tooter did so, and Nick proceeded to take a light drink, and filled up Nolan's glass.

"My treat, Blinky," he went on. "Say!"

"Spit it out."

"Where did you meet the boss?"

"I was hangin' 'round de Hotel Royal, and did a neat bit of shady work fer him when he had a lady wid him."

"De Hotel Royal? Dat's where he hangs out, ain't it?"

"It is, when he's in de city."

"He cums from Boston, don't he?"

"Naw! Chicago and St. Louis. Where did you meet him?"

"In de Cosmopolitan. I was doing a bit of de pass key work meself."

"It's de best business I see yet," hiccoughed Blinky, who was getting more drunk every instant. "I'd go in it meself, if I was a little more on de tone."

"Better keep shady fer a while."

"Of course. Say!"

"Wot?"

"Suppose us two go in dis game on our own hook?"

"I'm willin'."

Nick was silent for a moment.

There were a number of questions he wished to put to Blinky, but he knew that he must be extremely cautious, for though intoxicated, the tough was a mighty shrewd customer to handle.

While the two had been talking, Jake Tooter had left the room.

He now entered accompanied by a stranger, and the two began an excited conversation with Mammy Tooter.

Nick saw the three cast frequent glances toward him.

It made him feel uneasy, and he slipped his hand in his pocket to see if his pistol was ready for use.

"Say, Blinky," he began. "Wot's de boss' real name?"

If the tough could reply, the stranger and Jake Tooter approached the table.

Jake put his hand on Nick's shoulder.

"We wants ter talk wid you," he said, in a loud tone.

"What der yer want?" growled the detective.

"Ye said yer was Eastern Frank, didn't yer?"

"Yes, an' so I am."

"Yer a liar," burst out the stranger.

He had hardly uttered the words before Nick jumped to his feet, and drew a revolver.

"I don't allow any man ter talk ter me in that fashion, sonny," he exclaimed.

And he pointed the weapon at the man's head.

The fellow tumbled back.

"Take that where it came from, or I'll let the electric lights shine right through yer carcass," went on the detective.

"What yer want ter say yer Eastern Frank fer?" growled the man, in a lower tone.

"'Cause I am."

"Yer a li——"

"Stop thar, 'ceptin' yer wants ter commit suicide."

"I'm Eastern Frank meself."

As the stranger uttered these words, Jake Tooter looked at the detective closely to note the effect.

But Nick did not falter.

"Yer say yer Eastern Frank," he said, slowly.

"Well, I ain't got no cousin, an' I say yer a liar from Liarville, an' yer can't back it."

At these words the stranger's face grew dark as thunder, and he put his hand back to draw his pistol.

"Hold up, sonny!" ordered Nick. "I wasn't born yesterday, an' I don't allow ennybody ter git the best of me in that style. Own up like a man, wot's yer right name?"

"My name is Eastern Frank, I tell yer."

"Yer a liar. I'll give yer two minutes ter tell it straight, or by the jumpin' snakes I'll blow yer teeth out one at a time."

The real Eastern Frank was completely stumped. He knew not what to do. Jake Tooter looked from him to Nick.

"There is something wrong here," he growled. "An' I wants it cleared up in short order." He turned to Nick. "Can you prove you're the right man?"

"Course I can, Jake. Ain't I Eastern Frank, Blinky?"

As Nick spoke, he winked at Nolan.

"Course he is, Jake," replied that individual, with several hiccoughs. "He's all right. That ere feller is some spotter."

"Yer a liar," burst out Eastern Frank.

And he gave Blinky a terrific smash in the nose.

He had hardly done so before he found himself flat on his back, sent there by Nick's strong right arm, which had shot out like lightning.

"Strike my friend, will yer!" howled the detective.
 "Skip out of here before I pulverize yer."

The loud words and the blows drew the attention of all the other men in the room, and they gathered around.

"Wot's the row here?"

"Let them fight it out in the yard."

"Don't make so much noise, de cops will be down on us."

"Wot's de trouble, Jake?"

"Both dese men says da is Eastern Frank," explained Tooter. "One of 'em is a fraud, but I can't tell which one."

"Eastern Frank, eh?" exclaimed a tall man.

"Dat's it, Kossey."

"Well, I uster know Frank. Let me take a look at them."

And Kossey pressed closer.

"That's him," he said, pointing to the newcomer. "Ain't I right?"

"Course you is, Kossey," returned Eastern Frank. "Don't you remember de row down ter Springfield, doin' up der old farmer?"

"To be sure, Frankie." Kossey turned to Nick. "Yer a fraud."

Nick was in a tight fix, and no mistake. Still he knew it would mean instant death to falter.

He bent over Nolan, and whispered in his ear:

"What shall I do, Blinky?" he asked. "I had ter do it ter git in ter tell yer. Der boss is ter blame, I ain't. Is yer goin' ter help me?"

"Cert," replied Blinky. "I don't go back on no pal. But I guess yer got ter fight fer it."

"What has yer got ter say, now?" demanded Jake Tooter.

"He is a spy," cried out Mammy Tooter. "I suspected him from the first. Bind him up, men, and then we can examine him."

Mammy Tooter's word was always a command.

Not a man in the place dared to disobey her.

If they did they knew it would be useless to ever seek protection from her law in the future.

As she spoke she had turned the words half a dozen times in her mind.

There were but two things which were certainly the misfortune of the crowd.

One of them was a young man.

"Another step and you are a dead man," he said, and he stepped back.

"I am, am I?" cried Jake.

Nevertheless he paused.

But those behind pushed him forward, and Nick soon found himself hemmed in.

"Down with the spy."

"If he is a detective, kill him on the spot!"

Nick said no more.

The time was past for parleying; action was now the order of the day.

Raising his pistol, he brought the butt down with all force on Jake Tooter's head.

It made an ugly wound, and the man fell to the floor stunned.

"He has killed my son," shrieked Mammy Tooter.

"Kill him, kill him, boys! A hundred dollars to the first man who runs a knife through him."

At these thrilling words a dozen blades were brandished in the air.

For an instant Nick thought his last hour had come. He resolved to fight to the last.

Both arms shot out with tremendous force, and over went two of the foremost men like a couple of tenpins.

"I am not to be taken. Stand back every one who does not wish a bullet through his heart."

"Good. I'm wid yer," whispered Blinky.

And he reached out, and knocked over one of the smaller men.

"See if you can get to the door and open it," whispered Nick.

Following this advice, the tough dove under the table, came up on the other side, and made for the door.

Mammy Tooter saw the action, and jumped up to stop him.

Blinky was full of liquor or he never would have done what he did.

That was to hit the old woman and knock her down.

To touch Mammy Tooter was something that had never been heard of.

To the men who frequented her place, she was a sort of sacred personage.

She knew all their secrets, but had never given the slightest thing away.

For that reason she was held in high respect.

Blinky paid dear for his action.

The attention of the entire crowd was directed to him, and half a dozen pistol shots rang out at once.

With a cry he threw up his hands, and then fell face down, stone dead.

CHAPTER IX.

A TIGHT AND ROUGH FIX.

Nick was as much surprised as any one at the death of Blinky Nolan.

It pained him to think that the tough had lost his life while trying for once to do something that was really praiseworthy.

But now was no time to give this matter consideration.

The attention of all present was drawn to Mammy Tooter on the floor, and the corpse beside her.

For the moment the detective was forgotten.

And of that fraction of time Nick made good use.

He glanced around quickly, and saw another door in the rear of the room.

He had no idea where it led to. It might be merely the door to a closet, but he must run the risk.

He backed for the door, and, reaching it, threw it open.

It led into a back hallway, and into this he jumped, closing the door behind him.

As he did so, he heard a wild cry, and knew that his flight had been discovered.

The hallway was dark, yet Nick did not stop for this, but rushed on, his hands before him.

A dozen steps and he struck a wall. He passed along this, and came to another door.

As he did so, the other door opened, and Jake Tooter and two other men came rushing out.

"It's as dark as pitch here," he cried. "Some one git a light, quick."

One of the men started back. Ere he returned Nick had opened the second door, passed beyond, and closed it behind him.

He now found himself in a sort of bedroom. There were bunks on all sides. A dim lamp lit up the scene, and by it he saw several men lying asleep.

He tiptoed his way across the room as lightly as he could. As he did so, one of the sleepers roused up.

"Is that you, Foley?" he asked, drowsily.

"Yes," replied Nick. "Don't make any noise."

The man turned over, and gave a yawn. Nick passed close to his bed, and on to the end of the room. As he did so, he heard the handle of the door turn, and he had just time to hide behind a curtain before Jake Tooter and the others burst in.

"I'm positive he came this way. Let us search the room, boys!"

"What's the matter?" asked the man, who had just spoken to Nick.

"Did any one just come in here?" asked Tooter.

"Foley just came in."

"Foley!"

"What's de matter wid you, Matt. Here I am."

"Is that so. Well somebody just came in, an' he said as how it was you."

"It's that spy. Search the place, boys!"

The men separated at once, looking under the beds and into several closets.

In his place behind the curtain, Nick discovered a partly closed window. He raised its sash to its full height, and peered out.

In the uncertain light he saw an alleyway some six or seven feet wide. Beyond was a house, the roof of which was several feet higher than the window.

Could he jump from the window and catch the gutter of that roof? It was a risky thing to try, but was it as bad as to remain where he was?

In two seconds Nick was through the window and standing on the sill. Another second and he would have taken the jump.

But at that instant a pair of strong hands grasped him by the ankle.

"Here he is, Jake. I've got him."

Nick tried to kick the speaker, but the chap was smart enough to keep at arm's length.

In a moment Jake Tooter and the others appeared.

"We've got you at last, have we?" he snarled. "Make another move an' I'll blow the whole roof of yer darn head off."

Two revolvers were leveled at Nick's head, and the point of a dagger was thrust through the leg of his pants, until it rested directly upon the calf of his leg.

He tried to draw his pistol, but in his peculiar position found it impossible to do so. He hesitated for a second, and then sprang back into the room.

Instantly all the men set upon him. One gave him a sharp crack in the forehead, and for a moment he was stunned. When he recovered he found himself bound hand and foot, and Mammy Tooter standing over him.

"Yer a spy!" she cried, loudly. "Boys, what shall we do with a spy? Shall we kill him on the spot?"

"Let's find out something about him first," suggested Jake Tooter.

And he knelt down beside Nick.

Suddenly he jumped up.

"Foley, take a look and tell me who you think this chap is."

The man addressed did so.

"Nick Carter."

"What!" cried Mammy Tooter.

"It's true, mammy."

"Let's see," cried another of the men. "Yes, darn him, it is. This is the biggest haul ever made."

"Nick Carter, the greatest detective in New York. I owe him one fer sendin' me up fer three years."

"He had me sent up fer five."

"He had my pal hung."

"Kill him; kill him!"

"Let's torture him to death."

The last suggestion was hailed with delight.

"Yes, yes, torture him."

"What will we do?"

"Cut off some part of his body every half hour," suggested one.

"Soak him with kerosene and set fire to him," put in another.

"Cut off his feet and throw him into the sewer," added a third.

"Ha, I have it!" cried Mammy Tooter. "I will give him a vitriol bath and leave him to starve to death surrounded by food soaked with the same stuff."

There was a shout of approval, and Nick was dragged from the room and rolled downstairs.

Then he was dragged through the lower hall to a trapdoor.

"Now, down you go!" cried the old woman, giving his ear a yank that nearly took it off. "Rest in the cellar with the rats till we git Nolan's body out of the way, and then I'll fix yer."

She paused, and glared into his face.

Nick stared at her stonily, but said nothing.

This seemed to enrage her more than ever.

"Ain't yer goin' ter beg fer mercy?" she snarled.

"I would not beg it, if I did," was the detective's reply.

"Ain't yer scared?"

"No."

"Yer lie. Yer shakin' in yer boots."

Nick made no answer.

"Then what would yer give us fer git free?" went on the old woman, cunningly.

"Not a cent."

"Yer would lie?"

"No."

"Yer lie. If yer thought I would let yer go yer would scrape up every case yer got in the world. But yer know me too well. There ain't many fly cops here wot don't know Mammy Tooter an' ain't afraid of her. Do yer know wot I'm a-goin' ter do wid yer?"

"I don't know and I don't care."

"That's another lie. I'm a-goin' ter take a pan of vitriol and soak yer right foot in it, an' then yer left, an' then each hand, an' oh, my! won't yer holler! It will eat the flesh off ter the bone in a minit. An' all the catin' yer git will have vitriol sauce over it. Ho, ho, but I'll make yer squeal afore I'm done wid yer, see if I don't."

At these words Nick could not help but shudder.

Such a punishment was terrible beyond description.

As many readers know, a single drop of vitriol burns worse than a coal of fire.

What, then, would a bath of the stuff mean?

"Ah, I thought I could make yer knock yer knees," screamed Mammy Tooter. "Dump him down, Jake. We'll tend to him in less than half an hour."

At the words Jake Tooter pushed Nick until his head hung over the black opening beneath.

"Let him down kinder easy," said the old woman, hastily. "We don't want him to break his neck afore we've had our fun."

So a rope was procured, and the detective was lowered to the floor of the cellar below.

Then the trap was closed above him, and he was left alone.

CHAPTER X.

MATTERS GET MIXED.

We have just said that Nick was left alone. This is not strictly true.

The cellar was inhabited by swarms of rats, big fellows, too, and it was not long before they made their presence known.

He was in a tight fix, and no mistake.

He was bound hand and foot, and lying on the floor of a cellar, the outlet of which was probably tightly closed.

And unless he escaped within the next half hour he would be put to a slow and horrible death.

The first thing he did when he reached the cellar bottom was to see if he could not free one or the other of his hands.

To his delight he found the rope on his left wrist somewhat loose, and two minutes' work made it possible for him to slip his hand through the loop.

This done, it did not take him long to get clear of the rest of his bonds.

While he was working he heard a noise on the floor above him, and presently the trap was thrown open.

Instantly the detective threw himself on the floor once more, and placed the ropes about him.

"Roll out of the way down there, if you don't want to get a dead weight onter yer," called a voice from above.

Nick did so, and a moment later Nolan's corpse came tumbling down, and the trap was closed once more.

To an ordinary person it would have been a terrible situation to have the corpse of such a tough beside him, but Nick's nerves were steelled against any terrors of such a nature.

Instead of being frightened he was delighted that the murdered man's body had been placed within his reach.

Without hesitation he knelt down and examined all the pockets of the clothing.

Perhaps he might find some clew of value.

But every pocket was empty.

Mammy Foster and her son had gone through them thoroughly.

For an instant Nick thought of disguising himself in the tough's suit.

But time was valuable, and not a moment must be wasted.

He had not been deprived of his belongings, Mammy Foster intending to leave that until later, and now he drew forth his pocket lantern and lit it.

The cellar was long and narrow. In the front were two windows, tightly boarded up. In the rear was a small door.

Nick pushed open the door, and it swung out, much to his amazement, as he had thought it a way to a set of cellar stairs. A narrow passage was revealed, and this the detective entered, taking care to close the door behind him.

Harrying down the passage he came to a sharp turn, and then entered another cellar. Here was a flight of steps leading upward. Putting out the light, Nick ascended the stairs and found himself in an entry leading to the back room of a saloon on the next street.

"Hello!" he said to himself. "Here is something worth knowing. I'll have to send somebody down to investigate this later."

He pushed open the door to the back room, about an inch, and peered in.

Two men were seated at a table, playing cards.

One was a short, stout man, evidently an Englishman.

The other was a tall, slim fellow, with black, well-waxed mustache. Nick sized him up at once as a Frenchman, and he was right.

"And so they took the girl hoff to the jug, did they?" the Englishman was saying.

"Yes, the beautiful Annette, whom I lof so much," sighed the Frenchman. "Is it not von terrible thing?"

"And you wrote to the hotelkeeper habout it, did you?"

"Yes, I write von lettair, but him does no good—my beautiful Annette is still kept behind the dark, dark valls."

"Hit's a bloomin' shame, han no mistake, Jean, but I don't see what is to be done."

"Nor I, Hasker. It is den dousand times vorse than poverty."

"An' yet you was hallways finding fault because you was poor. It seems to me, Jean Glorieaux, you are never satisfied. You 'ave been complaining hever since you come to this blasted country."

"I shall nefer complain again, if my beautiful Annette gets free vonce more."

"You say you spent the evening with her?"

"Yes."

"How did you get to the rooms? By the helevator?"

"No! I haf a friend that lives in the house next door. He let me go to the roof, and I crawl in the window."

"A good friend that."

"Not so, for he now believe I stole the jewels."

"Hi see. Does the beautiful Annette believe so, too?"

"I know not. I left the house verra secret."

"Hi'm afraid you are in a blasted nasty fix, Jean. Better keep shady for a bit, don't cherknow."

"I vill. *Mon dieu*, but it is terrible."

The two men were drinking wine. They emptied their glasses, and Jean Glorieaux filled them up again.

Nick listened with bated breath to all that was said. Was he on the right and direct path at last?

Evidence pointed that way.

The young Frenchman had visited the maid on the evening of the robbery.

He had been let in from the housetop next door by the girl, and no doubt had departed the same way.

In his letters he had expressed a desire to be wealthy, and had spoken of the value of the madam's jewels.

What more likely then than that, when going away, he had taken them with him?

The man who had had the false key made was a tall fellow, and in this particular he tallied with the Frenchman.

But what had become of the casket of jewels?

It would never do to arrest this man until the jewels were recovered.

"Going home, now?" went on the Englishman, after the glasses were again emptied.

"No, no! I am afraid the police they await me. I shall stay with Monsieur Enfante."

"Hain't going hout to-night?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"To the Hotel Royal."

Nick started.

It was the very hotel Nolan had mentioned.

"A man and I am to meet."

"Who is it?"

Before the Frenchman could answer, another Frenchman entered the room.

He said something to Jean Glorieaux, and that individual arose at once.

"Ve vill have to leave," he explained to the Englishman. "Monsieur Enfante say some men desire to search this place for a man who came from the back and is hiding."

"Hi didn't see hor 'ear hennyone," replied Hasker.

Nevertheless he followed Jean Glorieaux, and, after the latter had paid the score, both left the premises.

A moment later there was the tramping of feet, and Jake Tooter and two others entered the back room.

"He must have come through this way, boys," Jake said.

"Couldn't he git outer de passage?" asked Foley.

"No."

"Dat uster be a good way, up trouh Slitter's."

"I had dat bricked up last month, after that Sweedish sailor got away. No, he is here or in the yard."

"Will you look fer?" asked Monsieur Enfante.

"Lookin' fer a bloke wot escaped," replied the third searcher.

"Who vos it?"

"Nick Carter."

"Ze celebrated detective?"

"That's him."

"And he ees here?"

"We think so. He is somewhere about, and we are bound to catch him."

"He no enter ze saloon."

"Then he is either in the cellar or in the back yard. Lively, boys, and don't let him escape."

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOTEL ROYAL.

Of course, Nick took in every word that was spoken. At the same time he planned some means of escape. From the conversation he knew it would be useless to go back to the cellar, as that would but lead to the point from which he had started.

Yet he must act quickly.

The hunters meant business.

In another moment the men would open the door to the entry.

Nick looked around for the door leading to the yard.

It was locked top and bottom, and both the keys were gone.

To pick the two locks would take too much time.

Already one of the men was approaching.

The detective cast the rays of his pocket lantern upward.

By its light he saw a narrow shelf directly over the door.

By a quick effort he pulled himself up, and, by placing his hand on the wall opposite, managed to stand upright.

It was a dangerous place, for the shelf was not strong, and threatened to come down at any moment.

He had hardly reached the position before the door opened, and Jake Tooter looked in.

"Don't seem to be here," he muttered to the others.

"Maybe he's in the cellar," suggested Foley.

"I'll go down and look."

Tooter passed on and Foley followed. The third man and the landlord remained in the entry.

"See anything?" called down the former, after a moment of silence.

"No. I guess he——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost to the listeners.

There was a crash, and down came the shelf, and Nick followed.

The detective landed squarely upon the head of the third hunter, and sent him to the floor like a shot.

"*Mon dieu!*", burst out Monsieur Enfante.

He said no more.

An arm shot out, and he went over on top of the other man.

"What's the racket up there?" cried Jake Tooter.

"He's here," gasped Foley, who stood at the foot of the steps, and caught a glimpse of what occurred.

Nick heard no more.

Jumping over the body of the prostrate Frenchman, he slid through the back room into the saloon.

A young man stood behind the bar, and several persons were drinking.

"The boss wants you," said Nick to the bartender, and, as the young fellow started for the back door, the detective hurried for the front.

Once outside, it did not take Nick long to put a good distance between himself and his pursuers.

As he hurried along, he made several rapid changes in his disguise.

He also kept his eyes wide open for Jean Glorieaux, but could see nothing of that individual.

The Frenchman and the Englishman had disappeared.

However, Nick was not greatly disappointed.

He knew where he would soon be able to meet his man.

Jean Glorieaux had mentioned the Hotel Royal as the place where he and another were to come together.

Who was that other?

Did the Frenchman refer to Blinky Nolan, the tough, who now lay murdered in Mammy Tooter's cellar?

"An hour will tell," muttered Nick to himself.

But he did not dream of the surprise and peril that were in store for him.

At length the changes in his make-up were finished.

He now looked like a young man around town who has been on a pretty stiff foot.

His eyes were bleary, and he walked with an uncertain step.

"Oleh, sir?" asked a Jehu, as the detective staggered up.

"Yes, sir."

"All right, boss, get right in."

"How—hic—much?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"Hot'lroy'l."

"Where?"

"Hot'lroy'l, corn'r Six' av'nue an' Fot' stree'."

"All right. Let me help you in."

"How much—hic—th' charge?"

"Two dollars."

"Giv' haf' dol."

"Make it a dollar, and I won't say a word more."

"Ke-rec'. Whip'er up!"

Nick plunged into the cab and on a seat. The door was banged shut, and they drove off.

It took but a few moments to reach Broadway, and the cabman kept on this great thoroughfare until Thirty-third street was reached. Then he turned down Sixth avenue, and presently came to a halt before a brilliantly-lighted café.

"Here we are at the Hotel Royal," he said, as he opened the door.

"Hot'lroy'l?"

"Yes, sir."

"The true an'-hic-genuine?"

"Yes, sir. Here, let me help you out."

"Don't want—hic—help."

"You had better let me give you a lift."

And the cabman took hold of Nick, and started to set him on the pavement.

"Keep yer—hic—han' outer m'pock't," cried the detective, suddenly.

For he had found the cabman trying to rob him.

"All a mistake, sir. One dollar, please."

Slowly Nick drew forth the money, and handed it over.

As soon as he received the fare the cabman turned to his box.

"Want to go anywhere else?" he asked.

"Naw."

At this the man made off. Nick watched him out of sight, and then started for the café.

He straightened up a little as he entered and took a seat near the back.

The café was attached to the hotel, and it was now comfortably filled by patrons who had drifted in from the various theatres and other places of amusement in the neighborhood.

Nick thought it more than likely that this was the spot where the meeting was to take place.

The waiter came up, and the detective ordered some light refreshments.

Then he settled back and began a careful survey of the people present.

He started with those around him.

A couple at the table directly before him soon attracted his attention.

The man was a heavy set fellow, with reddish beard.

The girl was slightly built, and wore curly, golden hair.

The man sat with his back to the detective, but his companion faced Nick.

"Who the deuce is that woman?" thought the detective. "I am positive I have seen that face before. It was at the other hotel, too."

Straining his ears, Nick caught the sound of the young woman's voice as she spoke.

Then the truth came to him like a flash.

The young woman was no other than Georgie Franklin, the assumed bellboy.

What was she doing in this place, at this hour of the night?

Who was her companion?

At length it became a little more quiet in the place, and then Nick caught most of what was being said.

"And you say you threw up the job to-night, Georgie?"

"Yes; at seven o'clock."

"It was a bad thing to do."

"Bah! Do you suppose I want to play servant any more than is necessary?"

"But this sudden leaving may direct suspicion to you."

"Don't worry. I provided for that?"

"In what way?"

"I got into a row with two of the other bellboys."

"I see."

"I thought I would be discharged."

"But you wasn't?"

"No. Old Maillard discharged one of the others instead."

"Perhaps he suspects——"

"Bah! Paul, you are as chicken-hearted as any man in New York."

"No, I am not. But I believe in being cautious."

"Pooh!"

"If you started the muss why wasn't you discharged?"

"Well, I suppose I was the best looking of the crowd, and that counted in my favor."

"But you left?"

"Yes. I said I wouldn't work in a place where the rest of the boys were down on me."

"What did Maillard say?"

"Nothing, simply directed Evans to pay me my wages."

There was a moment of silence.

"It is just as well," resumed the man. "To-morrow we can start for Philadelphia."

"I thought you said something about seeing Nolan to-night?"

"I intended to, but I've changed my mind."

"Why?"

"If I leave town, what's the good of paying him anything?"

"He may squeal on you."

"Not much. I've got him where the hair's short."

"Did he do up Nick Carter?"

"He sent word that he had."

"How?"

"Let a brick fall on his head from the top of a tenement house. He said it knocked Carter stiff."

"What did you promise him for the job?"

"A good deal more than he'll ever get."

And the man chuckled to himself.

The couple went on eating.

Once or twice the young woman cast a sharp glance at the detective, but she only saw a young man, apparently half full who took no notice of anything but what was directly on the table before him.

"Do we stop here to-night, Paul?"

"If you say so."

"Yes."

"All right. I want to get two connecting rooms."

"Why?"

"I expect several callers about midnight."

"Indeed! Who?"

"You'll see when they come. A young wife like you should not be too inquisitive."

"I have to be where you are concerned."

"Why?"

"Do you think I have forgotten the way you attacked me in the corridor of the hotel."

"You had no business to anger me."

"Then why did you want to do something for that miserable French girl."

"Because I was interested in her, and it was a pity to see her go to prison on our account."

"Bah! Paul Franklin, remember you are a married man."

"I am not likely to forget it while you are around."

And the man laughed bitterly.

"Enough of that," cried the young woman, angrily.

"If it was not for my wits you would still be as poor as you ever were. Every dollar you have came to you only through me."

To this the man made no reply.

Picking up a small satchel that stood on the floor, he placed it on the table.

"Have you finished?" he asked, sullenly.

"Yes. We can have a bottle sent up later on if we want it."

Then the young woman arose, and the two passed to the desk and then to the hotel office.

They had hardly done so when the young man about town also stopped eating.

"Where's th' check?" he hiccupped.

It was brought, and with some difficulty he paid it.

"Guess I'll go and get a room," he said to the waiter.

"My head feels as if it was going to split."

It took him several minutes to reach the hotel office.

When he did so he found only the night clerk in charge.

"What will you have, sir?"

"Wanter look at the register."

It was pointed out.

Nick gave a glance at the last entry.

"FRANKLIN PAULING AND WIFE, PINE BUSH, N. Y."

Behind this was the number 658.

"Dickson ain't here," muttered the detective, apparently to himself, but loud enough for the clerk to hear.

"What's that, sir?"

"My friend ain't here. But I suppose I can have a room all the same."

And Nick closed one eye hard.

"Certainly, sir. Something pretty good?"

"I don't know. Say?"

"Well, sir?"

"I had 58 las' time was here. Does that go this time?"

"Just taken, sir. I can give you the room next to it."

"Jus' as—hic—good?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Up we go."

In a moment Nick had scawled a name on the register, and then he was shown to Room 659.

CHAPTER XII.

AMID THE FLAMES.

The detective was positive that he was on the right track at last.

But two things remained to do.

One was to recover the stolen jewels.

The other to bring the thieves to justice.

When Nick entered Room 659 he found it not unlike hundreds of other hotel apartments.

It was well furnished, and there was a closet in the corner for storing clothing and other wearing apparel.

As soon as he entered, Nick locked the door.

Then he lit the gas, and turned it down low.

Next he approached the wall on the right and listened intently.

He heard the murmur of voices, and recognized the tones of Paul Franklin and his wife Georgie.

He opened the closet door, and was delighted to

learn that there was in it a door leading to the next room, so that the closet could be used from both sides.

Of course, this door was now locked, and the key had been taken away.

In two minutes Nick had the lock picked.

Then he opened the door just about the eighth of an inch.

By doing this he could hear and see all that was going on.

"Paul, are you sure the doors are tightly closed?"

"Yes, I tried them all."

"No one must surprise us while we inspect the jewels."

"No. Bring out the casket."

The young woman opened the satchel, and brought something forth. At a glance Nick saw that it must be the stolen sandalwood casket belonging to Madam Angot.

She opened it.

"Are they not beauties," she cried, holding up a number of diamonds and a pair of bracelets. "Paul, these will be worth twenty thousand dollars to us. How lucky it was that I discovered that Danny Gould was off duty from midnight till one o'clock."

"It would have been no good if that Annette had not been sleeping. Even as it was, I had to give her a small dose of chloroform to keep her from waking up too easily."

The couple spent an hour or more inspecting what they had stolen.

"Where are the people you expected, Paul?"

"I don't know. Perhaps they got frightened."

"Who were they?"

"One was Roxey, who wanted to go to Philadelphia with me. The other was a young Frenchman, who is in love with Annette."

"What did you want of him?"

"I have discovered that he called on the girl that owns my eye. It makes things look black against him, and I thought I would put up some job to have him arrested for the same."

"You are getting smarter, Mr. Paul Franklin."

"Well, rather. Didn't I plan that bogus check business?"

"Yes; but it was my nerve that got the signature. Besides that, who concocted that job down at the Astor House that brought us in two thousand?"

"Don't blow, Georgie. I won't feel safe till we are out of New York."

"Bah! I knew you had no sand."

Nick took in every word that was spoken.

He now learned that what his assistant, Patsy, had suspected of the young woman bellboy was true.

Nick looked at his watch.

It was exactly three o'clock in the morning.

His duty was plain.

He must leave the hotel, summon assistance and have the pair arrested.

He opened his door, and stepped into the hallway.

As he did so a sudden cloud of smoke smote him in the face.

"Fire, by George!" he muttered.

He ran for the elevator. He had hardly reached it before, with a sharp, crackling sound a column of flame shot up and swept toward him, causing him to retreat.

Then the whistle of a locomotive on the elevated road rang out along with the hoarse and frantic cry that echoed on all sides.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The Hotel Royal was in flames.

The flames were shooting into every hallway and creeping under every doorway.

Knowing the great danger, Nick started to run away from the elevator and gain a staircase in the rear.

As he did so, he passed the door of Room 658, and found it wide open.

The connecting apartments were empty.

On the table stood the jewel casket.

In an instant the detective had it in his possession.

"Georgie, have you got the jewels?" he heard a voice call.

"No! Oh, save me, Paul!"

"To perdition with you, woman. Take that!"

There was the sound of a blow, and then the falling of a body to the floor.

An instant later Nick found himself confronted by Paul Franklin.

"Give me that casket!" he roared.

"Not much, you thief!"

"It is mine! Give it to me!"

"Stand back!"

"Who are you?"

"Nick Carter."

"Nick Carter! Then Nolan did not kill you!"

"Not much. Instead Nolan is himself dead."

"I will have the jewels."

Paul Franklin pulled a pistol from his pocket, and fired it at the detective's head.

Nick raised the casket, and the bullet entered the soft wood.

Before the weapon could be again discharged, Nick sprang forward, and hit Franklin a stinging blow in the temple that sent him to the floor beside the woman he himself had knocked down.

As Nick jumped back two men sprang from a room close by.

At a glance Nick saw that they were Chick and Patsy.

"We followed him here," cried Patsy. "He is the guilty party."

"Yes; guilty in more ways than one," replied Nick, grimly.

"We must escape," exclaimed Chick. "See, the fire is all around us."

"Follow me," was the great detective's response.

Crouching low, he led the way to a back hall. The smoke was stifling, and the space hot and full of sparks.

At length they burst into a room the fire had not yet touched.

"Quick now, boys!" cried Nick. "Here are a couple of umbrellas. Open them and jump for the telegraph wires."

"What of you?" asked Chick.

"I'll follow."

The fearful jump from the fourth story was made. For an instant all three of the detectives found themselves spinning through the air. A shout from below went up.

"They will be killed."

"See, the—first two are safe!"

"Get a ladder."

"The third man has hold of a single wire."

Then a cloud of smoke hid the leapers from the view of the spectators below.

"Are you safe, Chick?"

"Yes."

"And Patsy?"

"All right, sir."

"Then follow me along the wires. Here is the pole. Slide down, and get away from the crowd. We must not be recognized."

This was done; and thus Nick Carter and his assistants escaped from the great disaster known as the Hotel Royal Fire.

In the ruins later on were found the charred bodies of the great sneak thief, Paul Franklin, and his wife Georgie.

No one but Nick recognized them, and he allowed them to be buried as two unknowns.

Madam Angot was overjoyed to recover her jewels. She rewarded the great detective handsomely, and Mr. Maillard paid over the sum he had promised.

The French maid, Annette Garnet, was at once released, and is now engaged to marry Jean Glorieaux.

And thus ended the great case of the stolen jewel casket.

THE END.

Nick Carter's next case took him to Florida, where an unusually brutal murder developed a mystery which became only more deeply involved as the investigation proceeded.

It was a fight by inches for Nick to untangle the slender threads that marked the trail, and no one was more surprised than he at the startling direction it finally took, ending in the counterfeiter's den. Don't miss this great story, exhibiting the detective's skill at its best. It will appear complete in next week's issue (No. 313), and will be entitled "Nick Carter's Fourfold Murder; or, Clever Work in Florida."

STORIES OF MYSTERY.

The names of the prize-winners in the last contest will be announced next week.

Meanwhile the new contest goes merrily on.

It is a corker.

Be sure and get into it.

For full particulars, see page 31.

A Policeman's Capture.

(By R. A. A., Jacksonville, Fla.)

It was two o'clock in the morning when Policeman Forbes made his second report to the Fourth precinct.

Then he shut the door of the call-box and made his way carefully through the intense darkness and heavy downpour of rain to his former place of shelter—the spacious doorway of a house several blocks up the avenue.

He was about to step inside when a vivid flash of lightning rent the surrounding blackness, followed by a distant rumbling of thunder.

During that momentary interval of light, the officer had caught a brief glimpse of two objects that caused him to remain with one foot poised above the second step.

Near the end of the block the outlines of a closed hack had been plainly revealed to him, and at the corner, a few rods away, a motionless figure had stood.

Officer Forbes had been on the force only a few weeks, and, although but a supernumerary, he was a man of keen perception and prompt action.

Four of the houses between the hack and the corner had been boarded up only a few nights since, their occupants, people of moderate wealth, seeking the cooler atmosphere of the mountains or the pleasures of the seaside summer resorts.

The presence of the vehicle and figure, then, was, at least, suspicious, and the officer decided upon a plan of action.

He made his way slowly toward the corner, dodging from door to door to avoid being discovered by a flash of lightning to the silent figure he had seen.

Soon the hack was dimly outlined before him, and the officer rapidly, yet cautiously, stole from the last protecting doorway and gained a position in the rear of the vehicle, where he crouched, waiting.

Ten minutes passed, when, from the basement of the house in front of which the hack stood, a man emerged.

Proceeding to the carriage, he opened the door and deposited within a number of packages, from the sound of which, as they came in contact with one another, the officer judged to be silver.

The man returned to the basement, and Forbes followed.

At the top of the stairs which led to the first floor a door was slightly open, and a faint gleam of light shone through.

The officer crept up silently, and peered into the parlor.

The thief was but a few feet away, in the act of fitting a bulky package.

His back was turned to Forbes, and the latter, with a leap, was upon him, his strong hands encircling the rascal's throat.

Then, despite the fellow's efforts, the officer pinned him to the floor, face downward, his hands still retaining their grip and choking the man into insensibility.

The unequal struggle soon ceased, and Forbes securely bound and gagged the thief.

Then he returned to the basement door and peered into the darkness beyond.

Satisfied, he stepped toward the hack.

He had almost reached it when a flash of lightning illuminated the scene, revealing the fact that the figure was no longer at the corner, but at the side of the vehicle. The same flash disclosed the officer's presence and identity, and a bullet whizzed by his head.

Forbes sprang forward and brought his clubbed revolver down upon the man's head ere he could fire again.

The fellow sank limply to the sidewalk, where the officer secured his wrists and ankles with handcuffs, after which he gagged him and thrust him inside the hack.

Then he dragged the first thief from the house and placed him beside his companion, saw that both doors were tightly closed, mounted the box and drove to his precinct.

The two criminals and their booty were turned over to the sergeant, and Forbes related the story of his capture to his fellow-officers, receiving their hearty congratulations for his brave and clever work.

The owner of the burglarized house was notified, and hastened back from his pleasure trip.

The story was repeated, and a few days later Officer Forbes received a substantial token of appreciation.

A Murder and Robbery.

(By D. Elrick, Frostburg, Maryland.)

It was not so very long ago that this murder took place. A very wealthy man was living on a farm about three miles from any neighbor. He lived there with his wife and granddaughter, and three farmhands.

On the night before he was murdered, a man asked one of the farmhands how many of the family would be at home on the following evening. He said he was selling jewelry. The farmhand said only the old man and his wife and granddaughter, as he and the rest of the farmhands were going to a town a couple of miles away.

The next night the farmer was sitting in his dining-room when a knock came at the door. His grandchild went to the door. The men outside asked to see the farmer. The farmer told them to come in. One of the

men had his jaw tied up. He said he had the tooth-ache.

The other one said he had lost some jewelry, was looking for it, had a search-warrant and he would like to search the house. The farmer was scared, for he had \$15,000 in the house, as he was going to buy some land the next day. But he took them to all the rooms in the house, and the last one which had the stand in. The men made him take everything out and tell them what everything was. And when they came to the money-box they made him open it. Just as he opened the box, one of the men shot him dead. They tried to kill the grandchild, but she escaped and called for help. The farmer's wife rang the farm bell and the three farmhands, who were on the way home, heard it ring and thought it strange for the farm bell to ring at ten o'clock in the night, and they hurried home, but were too late. The murderers had gone with the fifteen thousand dollars. The farmhands scoured the whole place, but it was of no use.

A couple of weeks after, three men were walking around a town spending money like water. Two of the men were neighbors of the murdered farmer. They were known to be poor. They were arrested and put in jail. Their trial came off. The grandchild recognized two of the men who murdered her grandfather. They were hanged, as they had a right to be.

Lost and Found.

(By E. M. Klingel, Marion, Ohio.)

In the suburbs of the little village of Mt. Gilead, Ohio, some years ago, lived Mr. and Mrs. Wayne, and their daughter, Violet, who had seen but four seasons.

She was a perfect beauty of a child, her golden curls hanging to her shoulders and almost hiding her pretty face.

On a pleasant summer evening, after the sun had gone to rest, the pretty little girl was playing by the roadside, the mother was at her evening work and thought her daughter was safe, until she went to look for her and found her missing. She at once told her husband, and the sad news soon spread through the village and country.

Some of the inhabitants had seen a covered wagon pass through the village several hours before, and they at once started in the direction it had gone; but its track was soon lost in the deep dust, and the light of the household could not be found or heard from. Mrs. Wayne soon died of grief for the little one, and her husband was left to mourn the loss of his dearest friends.

Twenty years passed away and found Mr. Wayne an old man, "wandering in quest of something he could not find."

One day, being tired of his lonely life, he answered an advertisement in a matrimonial journal and soon received a letter from Miss Maud Sexton, Dallas, Texas. The correspondence was continued until, finally, his second sweetheart consented to become his wife.

He sent her money to come to his home, which she did at once, where he soon fancied her loving ways.

During her visit he discovered a strange birthmark on her arm, and it led him to think of his baby daughter. Asking for her past history, she told him she had lived

with gypsies until she was sixteen, when she escaped and went to Dallas, Tex. She then produced a small locket with a miniature photo, which the old man at once recognized as his dead wife, and she his little Violet, who had been stolen years ago.

Thus two hearts beat happily, but not as one life, and the old man had his loving daughter for a companion the rest of his days.

Two Boy Detectives.

(By Clement Y. Yates, Milford, Conn.)

On Monday, November 18, 18—, a prominent citizen of Milford was attacked on the corner of West Main and High streets by a man with a large stick, and he turned around and ran home and arrived there breathless and nearly scared to death.

On the same night, Mr. Clark was attacked in the same place, and he, too, was scared and ran home.

Two boys, who were nicknamed "Nick" and "Chick," and who were amateur detectives, decided to solve this. So when "Nick" told "Chick," they each took a man to interview.

When they returned home, "Chick" asked "Nick" to bring his man to their headquarters in an old barn at 9 P. M. sharp, and he said that he would.

Nine o'clock came, and Chick pulled his man into a dark corner of the yard just as he heard "Nick" come up with Mr. Baldwin.

It was too dark to distinguish a person's features, and so when "Nick" and Mr. Clark came into sight, Mr. Smith exclaimed:

"That's the man."

And Mr. Clark said: "Your partner has the criminal in the shadow of those bushes."

Then the two boys took their men into the barn, and, by comparing notes, it was proved that, instead of a great crime having been committed, the two men had run into each other.

Mr. Smith had offered a reward of twenty-five dollars for the arrest and conviction of his assailant, and he now gave it to the boys after being convinced it had been a collision.

Rob's First Case.

(By Edward Burch, Cincinnati, Ohio.)

Rob was a freckled-faced lad of thirteen, who worked in one of the many broker offices in Wall street. It was the custom every night to take the money in the safe down to the bank overnight.

To do this, Mr. Baker, the junior member, carried it in a large valise. This particular evening it was after dark when Mr. Baker left with the money. As he neared an alley, two men sprang out and, as one snatched the valise, the other dealt him a blow that felled him like an ox.

As one of the robbers picked up the valise he thought he heard a noise, but, upon turning, he found that it was nothing but an ash-barrel. If he had but looked into that ash-barrel he would have found something that afterward cost him all his trouble.

As they ran down the alley, who should climb out of the

barrel but Bob, and going to his boss, he reached in his pocket and, taking out two thirty-twos, followed the robbers.

"Guess des will help me er long," remarked Bob, "cause Tom Burke and Joe Sweeney er tuf nuts." He was well acquainted with these two worthy gentlemen, because one had been his father's pal. Making his way to one of the lowest dens in the city and climbing through the window, he secreted himself under a sofa.

He had not long to wait, for in a few minutes the men came in and seated themselves, and began counting the money. "An' jes' ter think, Tom, it's all fer us," said Joe. "Yes," said Tom, "\$56,450 ain't no little bit."

"Ah! no, gentlemen, it is for its owner," said a childish voice, and, turning, they found themselves confronted by two revolvers in the hands of a boy who was standing on a chair. "By jingo, it's Jim's kid." "Yes, Tom Burke, it's me, and I want you and yer pal to throw up yer hands and march out, and if yer move I'll pump yer full of lead." And, picking up the valise, he marched his prisoners to the police station.

Great was the joy next day when it was found that the money had been saved, and the prisoners caught by the office boy, Bob. His salary was doubled, he was made a clerk, and received a present of five hundred dollars.

If to-day you should visit New York you would see on an office window: "Robert Waddell, Private Detective."

A Fair Deceiver.

(By Tony D. Richards, New Castle, Pa.)

There was a man named Mr. Richard Burton, who was a jeweler at Notting Hill.

He was robbed every night. So he put a detective on watch one night. This detective heard a noise. He waited, and saw a girl, masked. She had a key which fitted the safe lock. She got what she thought necessary and was going to leave, but the detective jumped from his hiding place. At last he discovered who it was. He told whom he suspected, but the jeweler thought it was impossible, so the detective brought the girl before him with the jewels in her hand. So this girl was brought to justice by Mr. Donovan, detective, of the London staff.

Mr. Burton still has his jewelry store, Mr. Donovan has his place as a detective, and Miss Lydia Hartely has been brought to justice at last.

The Tell-Tale Heel.

(By Herbert Werle, Medford, Wis.)

There was a storehouse by the river in which valuable goods were stored, such as binder twine, barb wire and all sorts of tools. The building was built on posts. One morning some goods were gone. No trace of them. Next morning some more were gone. Nothing was tampered with, but the goods were gone. Some of us boys went under the building. The bottom was wet sand. Some goods lay on it, and a man's footprints were seen. The heel was of a curious formation; it had no corners! Investigating, a trapdoor was found. So far so good,

but we had not the thief. We found tracks to the river, and from it. We also found where a boat had been stuck in the sand. The nose pointed up the river. So we proceeded slowly, but surely, till we found a farm down the river where boats were. But on the river bank were those same tracks. The owners got a search warrant and searched the farmer's house and found the goods, and the farmer with those shoes on. He was arrested and sentenced to twelve months in the workhouse, and the owners gave us each a twenty dollar bill for our services. This was our first detective work, and it was easy enough.

Killed Over a Shotgun.

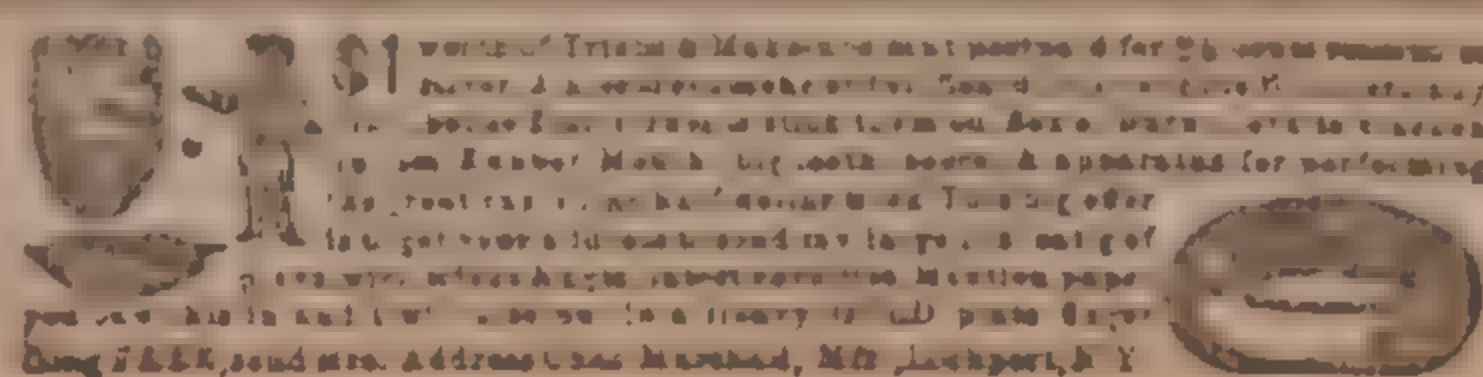
(By Chas. Burbage, Sylvan Springs, Ark.)

Horace Denton, colored, unwillingly gave up his life as a forfeit for that of Tom Vestal. The conviction was secured under a perfectly clear, but most peculiar, chain of circumstantial evidence. The murder occurred in January, 1902. Vestal resided in northern Arkansas. He had traded a gun to Denton and Denton had given him a cow in payment, claiming the cow was his own, but later it was found that the cow belonged to Ed. Wilson, also colored, who resided near Denton.

A few days later Vestal went to Denton's and got the gun, telling Denton that the cow belonged to Smith. On the following day, Vestal was shot and killed while at work in his field, near the house. Vestal's wife, being in the garden at the time, heard the report of the gun and saw Vestal fall, but she did not see the person who fired the shot, as the assassin was concealed in a thick growth of hazel brush. She alarmed the neighbors, and a thorough search was made. They discovered tracks behind a tree where the murderer had fired from ambush, and the ground being very soft, the tracks were easily followed to a creek, in which the murderer had waded for a half mile to ward off discovery. On the opposite side of the creek the tracks were found again, and it led direct from there to Denton's house. The tracks showed plainly that the boots worn by the man making them had twenty-four square-headed tacks in the heel of the boot worn on the left foot, and nineteen round-headed tacks in the heel of the right one. A girl at Denton's house said that he came home wet to the waist and had taken off his boots and put on a pair of shoes.

Denton was arrested. A search was made, and the boots were found in a hollow stump about a quarter of a mile from the house, where he had hidden them. The boots fitted the tracks perfectly, even to the print of a sock where it protruded through a hole in one of the boots.

At the trial it came out that Denton, fearing that Vestal would have him arrested for trading a cow that did not belong to him, had killed him to stop any further proceedings. He succeeded in his purpose, but it cost him his life, as he was convicted, and, on the 17th of October, was hanged.



STORIES OF MYSTERY



ARE you interested in stories of that nature? Do you know any stories with a mystery in them? If you do, write it out and send it to us. In this new Mystery Story Contest we are giving away

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Just look at the list of books for boys given below. They are the very finest stories that money can buy and written by celebrated authors with whom you are all familiar. Do you want to win two or more of these books? **YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO WIN TEN.** Write out any story you know into which the element of mystery enters, and send it in.

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The five boys who send in the five best stories will each receive **TEN BOOKS** from this list.

The ten boys who send in the next best stories will each receive any **FOUR BOOKS** they may select in this list.

TEN SECOND PRIZES!

FIFTEEN THIRD PRIZES!

The fifteen boys who send us the

next best stories will each receive any **THREE BOOKS** they may select in this list.

TWENTY OTHER PRIZES!

The twenty boys who send in the

next best stories will each receive any **TWO BOOKS** they may select in this list.

HERE ARE THE DIRECTIONS

This contest will close March 1st. Remember, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name. To become a contestant for these prizes, you must cut out the Prize

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